Counselor’s Corner

Dependence and Justice

“Why Do Other People Get What I Want?”
By Dr. Glenn R. McElhinney

Dependence and Injustice

God designed us to be relational beings. We were designed to be in relationship with Him, Adam and Eve were the only two human beings to experience that perfect relationship with God. They enjoyed for a time that day by day closeness and walk with God in the garden. Unfortunately, their desire to be like God forever jeopardized that designed closeness for them and for the entire human race.

We struggle with relationships at every level in society; men and women struggle in their marital relationships; children struggle with their parents; siblings struggle with each other; employees struggle with their employers; neighbors struggle with neighbors; church people struggle with other church people and church leaders; denominations struggle with other local assemblies; missionaries struggle with other missionaries and the national people to whom they came to share the Good News; politicians debate and struggle with other politicians over ideologies; and nations struggle with other nations. Relationships are a mess, no matter who you are or where you go.

Relationships are a mess because our original father and mother, Adam and Eve, decided to be independent of and from God. It was their sin of believing that they could find and enjoy a life of peace apart from the One who had created and designed them to be dependent on Him. Nothing in human nature has changed since that time in the garden.

Dependence Versus Independence

The struggle of dependence versus independence is nothing new. Teenagers have always wanted to be independent of their parents. Whether it is to borrow the keys to the car in order to go to a concert with their friends three hours away or to go on Spring Break with friends to a faraway Caribbean Island. Couples want to be independent from their marriage vows because they have found someone or something they would rather have a relationship with so they file for divorce. Whatever the circumstances, the issue is the same, independence from someone or something.

The ultimate battle for independence is between man and God. We, like Adam and Eve, want to live life independent of Him. We want and demand to live autonomously from God. We have deceived ourselves and have been deceived into believing that we can live and function well, independent from our Creator and Designer. It’s a battle we fight with great tenacity yet never ultimately win. Trust me – I’m Irish and I know a bit about being stubborn! It doesn’t matter how many times and how hard we hit the wall of what we are demanding to have and not receiving, yet we don’t give up easily and for some, never.

God’s desire and design for us is to be totally dependent upon Him so that He can provide us with all things. Dependence is about God’s desire to have a relationship with us, with me. A messed-up rebellious sinner is desirable to a Holy God. Who else would love us so
unconditionally? No one you know. Even your mother and father have their moments of trying to love you with all of your stuff!! Even your spouse of many years struggles to love you unconditionally ALL the time. You are not the prize you think you are!

**Our Heart’s Desire**

It’s fascinating to me how the deepest desires of the heart are to belong, to be in relationship, yet we reject with great vigor the One who loves us as we are. Why is that? Because in our need to belong and be loved, we still want it on our terms and conditions, we want to dictate how my children, spouse, friends, and God will have a relationship with me. We need and demand to be in charge of how the relationships will work and what they will look like. It’s all about me.

As we pursue our own agenda in our relationships, we eventually realize that we can’t control the relationship process like we imagined. Others have agendas of their own. They have a relationship plan also. Their hearts are full of sinful desires too. When we are orchestrating our own agenda in building relationships, we forget that other sinful people are using us like we are using them! When God is not in the equation, relationships become more of a mess than usual, Humans left to their own devices will become more and more self-focused, downright selfish. In this battle for independence, wills and hearts become more evil, deceived, broken, and hurt. Eventually, people who are following their own plan as opposed to pursuing God see life as unfair. Sometimes the “good” people of our society and churches see life as not fair.

“Not fair” translated means that someone is getting something I view in either one of two ways. First, that the person or group in focus is not worthy of what they are receiving. The person should not be dating the person I want to date; the couple that sees another couple succeed in a way that they want to succeed (but who in reality are failing); your co-worker gets the promotion that you wanted and who contributed less receives all the credit; a person receives all the attention in a gathering, and you don’t, even though you know that you have a better personality. The list could go on, you fill in the blank of your situation where someone other than you is gaining recognition that you believe they don’t deserve.

Second, the person or group is getting away with something that they should be punished for doing. How do other people get away with what I’d like to get away with and not get caught? When others are getting what we don’t think that they deserve, we cry “Unfair!” “Unjust!”, and then demand justice. Think about the person in the office who steals your idea and pitches it to the boss and gets a bonus. You cry, “Not fair.” Other examples may include: the kids at school that started the fight which you attempted to break up, only to be included in the group that gets suspended for two days. You file your taxes each year, pay what you owe and then see the commercials on TV for those who owe a pile of money and then pay only a fraction of what they owe. They are rewarded for their negligence and breaking the law, yet they are rewarded. “Unfair!” “Where is the justice?”

Why are we so outraged by these events of injustice? If we were really honest, is it because we wish we could get away with what those people did? We wish we could not file our taxes for several years, owe a large sum, get away with no penalties for failing to file and then only pay a fraction of what we actually owe. The wicked always seem to prosper!

**The Psalmist and Injustice**
The psalmist had the same struggle seeing the wicked prosper. If you are honest you could come up with a list of examples where you believe the wicked prospered and you, “the holy one” didn’t prosper, or get what you wanted.

Psalm 37:1 states: “Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!”

Psalm 73:1-9; 13: 1Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked 4 For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. 5 They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. 7 Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. 8 They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. 9 They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. 13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

The struggle with the wicked prospering is nothing new. Thousands of years ago the psalmist was lamenting what he perceived as unjust, acknowledging that he was envious of sin. The implication of being envious is that the psalmist wishes he could do what the evil person is doing, including the perceived benefits and getting away with it, as he saw the situation. There didn’t seem to be any justice. Prospering like the wicked and not being caught is the real desire of every human heart. So, the truth is that the psalmist wasn’t as holy as he might appear. In fact, he reflects the true heart of most of us in this situation, our sense of injustice rarely flows from a pure heart caring for what is right and true but out of an envious heart.

The reason we struggle with the wicked getting away with something is that they seem to experience no consequences for their sin. In fact, they prosper and seem to be rewarded for their sin. That really eats away at us. Verses four and five of Psalm seventy-three show the specifics of how the psalmist, representing us, sees the wicked prosper. The wicked experience only physical discomfort at the time of death or so it appears. Not only do they seem to experience no pain, their bodies are full and good looking “sleek”. Additionally, they don’t seem to experience trouble or be in trouble like others. They seem to be privileged. Again, the psalmist reflects our attitude, “How come they get all of the breaks?” Again, the sin of envy.

Beginning in verse thirteen of Psalm seventy-three the psalmist laments the prosperity of the wicked and then transitions into his “woe is me” syndrome. “All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.” While this statement seems to reflect godliness, “a clean heart and hand”, the true heart is revealed because the psalmist sees the clean heart and hands as “in vain.” In other words, he followed all the rules of being holy but he didn’t get the payoff, the blessing. Instead he experiences trouble and difficulties in life. This reflects a works-righteousness mentality that believes that if one does all of the right, biblical things, then blessing will come instead of suffering. The problem is that the Bible makes no such promise. It is a warped view of holiness. Our desire should be to pursue holiness because we desire to be more like God. 1 Peter 1:14-16: 14 “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

The psalmist, in Psalm 73 spent so much time attempting to reconcile the injustice that “it seemed to me a wearisome task…” (v.16). His solution to this wearisome task was only resolved when “I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.” Being in the sanctuary, in the presence of God, changes the perception of the psalmist. The same is true for each of us. It is only when we begin to spend time with God that we begin to have a change in the attitude of the heart. The psalmist transitions in verses 24-28 in acknowledging his struggle and embracing the
benefits of being in God’s presence: 24 “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. 28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.”

Dependence and Injustice

What does all of this talk of injustice have to do with the topic of dependence on God? Psalm 73:25 demonstrates the connection: “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.” The psalmist, after observing and bemoaning all of the injustice he has experienced and seen, comes to the end of himself and realizes that he only has God. This is the moment that the relationship, that God designed us to have with him, begins. In Psalm 73:26 he acknowledges that his health may fail and is spirit may grow weak but God is his strength. “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Humility of who we are and an acknowledgement of who God is creates the beginning of a biblical relationship with God. The walk that Adam and Eve experienced with God in the “cool of the evening” was a walk of humility between man with his Creator. The psalmist sees in verse 27 of Psalm 73 that the wicked will perish and so their temporary success is just that, temporary. “For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. In the end of time there is justice.”

Lesson Learned

In the concluding verse of Psalm 73 the psalmist acknowledges that ultimately it is good to be in relationship with God: “But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do!”

This should be the focus of all followers of Jesus Christ: relationship with him, not the injustices of the world. Knowing and believing that God ultimately brings justice enables us to focus on having an intimate relationship with Him in the here and now. When the Sovereign Lord becomes your shelter, you will be focused on enjoying the benefits of being near the Sovereign Lord, the Creator of the universe. This is the relationship that He designed for us. In this relationship, we realize that dependence is not a thing to be feared or struggle against but rather to be embraced and enjoyed.

Conclusion

God is not unaware of the injustices in this world. They come from the sinful heart of man for whom He died. The Apostle Paul recognized and experienced the injustices of the world but he concluded in 2 Corinthians 1:9: “Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” The injustices and sufferings of this world are not to make us dependent and strong in and of ourselves but to make us “rely on God.”

May we also be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul to pursue God and trust that God will exalt us because He truly does care for us. 1 Peter 5:5-7: 5 “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”
Total dependence upon God is the only possible outcome of becoming one with Jesus. God never intended any of us to be strong in ourselves. This is why we ultimately fail when we attempt to live life independent from Him. May we desire to live a life of being dependent on Him. Amen

Endnotes:

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